

# The brand man

Hans Hulsbosch has rebadged some of the biggest names in corporate Australia. Now he wants to rebrand the nation, writes **MATTHEW BENNS**.

**T**he man hired to redesign the famous Qantas flying kangaroo logo walked into the chief executive's office flourishing a hand-drawn cartoon of a kangaroo in a wheelchair.

The kangaroo had had its legs amputated.

The Qantas chief executive at the time, Geoff Dixon, burst out laughing. He had sent Sydney brand consultant Hans Hulsbosch to Toulouse to see if the kangaroo logo needed a makeover to fit the new Airbus A380 superjumbo. Here was his answer.

"What better way to explain it to a CEO," Hulsbosch says. "They have a million things going on in their heads, so you have got to hit them between the eyes, it makes them instantly focus on what you are doing."

His cartoon explained the problem in one hit. Unlike older jets, the entire rear stabiliser on the A380 moves up and down in flight. It would have sliced the legs off the old Qantas flying kangaroo as it moved.

"We would have had a national icon without any legs. That was why it had to change," Hulsbosch says.

Redesigning the kangaroo, moving its legs forward to avoid the moving stabiliser, took "10 minutes". But the research that went in before that took months and built on years of experience working with Qantas.

On the surface it seems Hulsbosch is paid a lot of money to create ideas that someone else could manage with a few doodles on the back of a coaster in the pub. But he insists the simplicity of design disguises the

complex skills required to distil the essence of a company and its ethos into one image.

"It is about getting in there and finding out what is the DNA of the business and what they need. These are things you only learn through years and years, and you just get better and better at it.

"Qantas has some awesome people at the top who really understand the business of image."

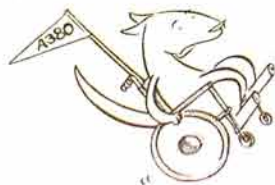
That skill does not come cheap but Hulsbosch does not like to talk about how much he was paid for the redesign. "A good identity can cost anywhere between \$10,000 and \$10 million, depending on the size of the job," he says. His office is in the middle of Mosman on Sydney's exclusive North Shore and his home in Balmoral has panoramic views of the harbour, leaving you to draw your own conclusion as to which end of the pay scale he operates.

The companies that hire him believe he is worth every penny. "He is terrific. I find him to be a very good listener with an intoxicating level of enthusiasm," says Woolworths marketing general manager Luke Dunkerley.

"We thought long and hard about changing the brand. We believed the one we had was not going to do the job well enough in the future, so it was worth taking the chance." The brief to Hulsbosch was to create a new brand that emphasises Woolworths as "the fresh food people".

Hulsbosch spent months talking to the people at Woolworths to "absorb their DNA" and try to channel their core message in one powerful, easily identifiable brand image. His lettuce

The image-maker ... Hans Hulsbosch; the old Qantas logo (below); a persuasive argument for change (bottom left); the Hulsbosch-designed Qantas logo (bottom right). Photo: James Brickwood



leaf-look brand is now gradually being applied to more than 8000 products and more than 900 stores nationwide.

"I normally build up a huge pressure in my head and then wake up in the middle of the night, grab a pen and sketch it out," he says. The technique has worked for organisations including the Australian Ballet, Taronga Zoo and P&O cruises.

He acknowledges that many of the early brands, such as the platypus for Taronga Zoo, remain powerful images that can be tampered with but never completely changed. The people who created them in the days long before brand image became a science were "absolute geniuses", he says.

Hulsbosch, 58, is passionate about image and what it means. He was born in Valkenswaard in the Netherlands, near the Belgian border, and studied at the school of graphic design in Eindhoven before moving to Amsterdam. But Australia has always been in his blood.

"I have always had a hunger to come here. The first thing I ever drew was a kangaroo," he says.

When he and wife Marianne were ready to move to Australia, there was a call for plumbers, not graphic designers. "So we went to New Zealand as a detour and then just hopped across."

Thirty years and two Australian sons later, his ardour for Australia is undimmed. "I love this country, there is no other country like it. When I travel around the world it is really depressing, it is aggressive and claustrophobic. I just can't wait to get home."

But Hulsbosch, the image expert who dresses in Armani suits and Bally shoes but still wears Bonds undies, believes the Australian national brand badly needs a makeover.

"If we want to make a great nation that people want to come and visit, then it needs a big idea," he says. Not Lara Bingle asking "Where the bloody hell are you?"

"That was too aggressive. Lara has done well out of it, she is the only one. Promoting Australia needs to be bigger than that," Hulsbosch says.

The same for Baz Luhrmann. "Wrong ads, wrong time. They portrayed an image of Australia that is just not right for these times. I think there is a better way to think about this country than we are doing currently. There is so much space, if I was doing an ad for Tourism Australia I would concentrate on the space."

He believes the country, just like the corporations that employ him, needs a brand to unify it. A meaningful brand that says "Australia" in the same

way the Qantas kangaroo does to people around the world.

"It starts right at the top as to what is wrong with the brand. I think the flag is one sign that is wrong with this country. I wait for the day that we can change flags," Hulsbosch says.

He cites the example of Canada which united the nation behind a bold new flag. At the moment, he says, the Australian flag roots the country in the past. "The Union Jack is a fantastic flag - for England. Not for us."

Hulsbosch has designed a new Australian flag, with dominant red tones to signify the colour of the Australian earth, part of the Southern Cross and a fraction of the Union Jack. It sounds complicated but he insists it is a simple design.

"I have copyrighted it but I would prefer to unveil it when the time is right." Although politicians are concentrating on the global financial crisis, Hulsbosch believes that the time for change is now.

"There are lots of really great companies in Australia that understand what needs to happen as we come out of this downturn. They know that they need to look at their brand, which is absolutely key now in order to be ready when times get rocking again."

"A lot of these big companies, instead of spending their marketing funds on advertising, they are now concentrating on their brand because brand creates loyalty. Brand Australia is no different."

Hulsbosch says he is waiting for the call. His old Qantas mate Geoff Dixon joins the board of Tourism Australia as deputy chairman in July, perhaps he will ask him to come on board and help rebrand the nation?

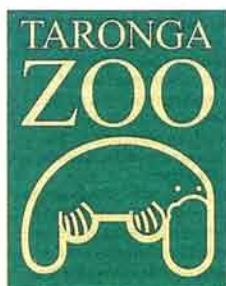
But until someone in Government or tourism indicates the time is right, Hulsbosch is keeping his unique view of the new Australian brand firmly under lock and key.

Does Australia need a new brand? Tell us what you think: [shletters@mail.fairfax.com.au](mailto:shletters@mail.fairfax.com.au)



**Woolworths**  
the fresh food people

**'The Fresh Food People'**  
**WOOLWORTHS**



**TARONGA**

Local identities ... Taronga's new logo alongside its predecessor; and a fresh look for Woolworths (top right).

